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INDIVIDUAL EFFORT IN TRADE EXPANSION¹

BY HON. ELIHU ROOT,
United States Senator from New York.

Governments may hold doors open all over the world, but if there is no one to go through them it is an empty form, and people get tired of holding doors open as an empty form. The claims of a government to consideration soon come to be regarded as pretentious unless there are really substantial interests behind the claims. No government, and least of all our government, least of all a democratic republic, can make commerce to go through open doors, to avail itself of fair and equal treatment, and to give substance and reality to the theoretical increase of amity and friendship between nations. The people of the country must do it themselves, and they must do it by individual enterprise; they must do it by turning their attention toward the opportunities that are afforded by friendly governments, by availing themselves of those opportunities, and by carrying on their business through availing themselves of them. But while it is a matter of individual enterprise, while that must be the basis of all development and progress, all advance, all extension, nevertheless, there must be something besides the individual enterprise. The great principle of organization which is revolutionizing the business and the social enterprise of the world, applies here as it applies elsewhere. No single business can make very much advance except as all other business of the country makes advance. No one can go into a new field very far in advance of others; and the way for each man to make his business successful in a new field is to do his share as a member of the community, as a citizen of his country, as one of the great business organizations of his country, to advance the trade, the commerce, the influence of his country as a whole in the field into which he wishes to enter. A recognition of the dependence of each man's business for its prosperity and progress upon the prosperity and progress of the business of all is necessary in order that

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there be real progress. Now, there are governments which undertake actively to lead in this direction, and they are governments which are making enormous progress. Germany, a country regarding which Mr. White has just spoken in such apt and appropriate terms, leads, and to a considerable extent in various directions, it requires the combination of her manufacturers, her producers, and her commercial concerns. Japan practically does also. There is solidarity brought about by the wonderful organization of that combination; so that it is one for all, and all for one, under government leadership. We can not do it here. Our country can not take that kind of lead. Our people do not conceive of that as a function of government, and as far as the activities of our government are concerned, they are largely engaged in breaking up organizations which do increase the industrial efficiency of our country. I do not want to be understood as criticizing that. It is all right to break them up when they are taking too great a portion of the field for themselves. It is all right and important to break them up when they are monopolizing the means of subsistence that should be spread throughout the great body of the people. But we must recognize the fact that when our government does enforce the law—a just law, wise law—against our great commercial and our great industrial organizations, it reduces the industrial efficiency of the country. There is only one way to counteract that effect, not violating any law, but securing through organization the united action, and concentrated action of great numbers of Americans who have a common purpose, substituting that kind of organization for the organizations which it is the duty of our government to break up, because they are contrary to our laws.

I am much gratified by this meeting and by the association of so many practical men, business men, who, by uniting, are really creating a new force in this direction, upon which I am sure we ought to move.

Let me say one thing about the practical direction of your efforts. The so-called ship subsidy bill has been reduced now to nothing but the proposition that the government should be authorized to pay out of the profits of the ocean mail service adequate compensation to procure the carriage of the mails by American steamers to South America; that is what it has come down to. It passed the Senate, as Mr. White has said, only by the casting of the vote of the Vice-President, and I do not know

what will be done with it in the House. I am afraid in these last days that it may be lost in the shuffle.

There are two reasons why that perfectly simple and reasonable proposition failed to carry a great majority of the Senate, and fails—if it does fail—to be certain of passing the House. One is because there is a difference between the people who want to have the thing accomplished about the way in which it should be accomplished. That is one of the most common things in the world. A certain set of men who want to have a revival of our merchant marine say the way to do it is to pay subsidies, the way to do it is to equalize the differences between the cost of maintaining and running an American ship and the cost of maintaining and running a foreign ship, and to equalize the subsidies paid by practically all the other great commercial nations to their steamship lines. Another set of men who equally desire to restore our merchant marine say that is not the right way; the right way is to throw open the doors and enable our people to buy their ships abroad; but still others say the true way is to authorize our ships to employ crews and officers of the low-priced men of the world, relieve them from the obligations that are imposed upon them in respect of the employment of Americans, people of the United States, who will require the high standard of living that has been produced in the United States by the operation of our protective system, relieve them from the obligations which are imposed upon them by our laws in regard to the requirements of the crew and air space, the food, and the treatment that a crew is to receive, so that it will be cheaper to run an American ship. Now, between these different sets of people, having different ideas of the way to accomplish a thing, nothing is done; and that situation which exists so frequently regarding so many measures will exist forever unless there is put behind the proposition a force that gives it a momentum to carry it over such obstacles; put force enough behind it so that the gentlemen in the Senate and House of Representatives understand that they are going to be held responsible by the American people, going to be held responsible for not doing the thing, for not finding out some way to do it, and they will come to this sensible conclusion very shortly, and that is:

“We will settle the controversy about the way it should be done

by trying one thing first, and if that don't work we will try the other."

Another difficulty about this measure is that there is a difference in appreciation of its importance in different parts of the country. Down here on the seaboard I think most people do appreciate it. You appreciate it; all the people who are concerned, or wish to be concerned, in South American trade, or trade of the Orient, appreciate it; but you go back into the interior of the country, into the great agricultural states of the Northwest, and the farther Middle West, states along in the valley of the Mississippi and the Missouri, and the people there are thinking about other things, and they have a natural dislike for subsidies, and when told that a measure means giving somebody else something for nothing they express and impress upon their representatives a great dislike for it. The way for us to get something done is not for us who are in favor of it to talk to each other about it. We can do that indefinitely without getting much further. The way is to take steps to bring to the minds of the people of the valley of the Missouri and the Northwest, and those great agricultural states the importance to them, as well as to us, of having our merchant marine restored.

I noticed here the other day that the people of San Francisco were justifying their confidence in themselves by procuring all their business correspondents in the State of New York to write letters to me in favor of having the great "Exposition and Celebration of the Opening of the Canal in San Francisco;" and these letters came in by the thousand from my constituents. They became so tiresome that I came very near voting against the project as a measure of revenge, but it showed the San Francisco people understood where to go in order to preach their doctrine. They did not talk to each other on the Pacific coast about it. They came to New York and got their business correspondents interested in it and got them to talk to their representatives about it. That is what you want to do in Kansas and Nebraska and Iowa and the Dakotas—you want, through all the relations that you have, and by every means in your power, to represent to the people of those great interior states, who have but little direct relation with the ocean commerce of the world, the real conditions under which we exist, and the importance to the whole country of doing some-

thing; and if they do come to appreciate the importance to the country of doing what you are talking about, then they will be for it, for they are sincere, patriotic Americans.

There is but one thing more I want to say regarding the relations which underlie the success of such an enterprise as you are now engaged in. Of course, you have had a great amount of advice and a great many speakers have told you a great many things you know, and I am going to put myself in line with the distinguished gentlemen who have preceded me by doing the same thing. At the basis of all intercourse, commercial as well as social, necessarily lies a genuine good understanding. That can not be simulated; the pretense of it is in general in the long run futile. People trade with those with whom they have sympathy; they tend to trade with their friends. The basis of all permanent commercial intercourse is benefit to both parties—not that cutthroat relation which may exist between enemies, where one is trying to do the other—and a relation upon mutual respect, good understanding, sympathy, and friendship, and the way to reach the condition which is thus essential is by personal intercourse and acquaintance between the men of Anglo-Saxon or German or Norse, or whatever race they may be, peopling the United States, and the men of the Latin-American race peopling the countries of the South. This is something, my friends, in which our people are very deficient. So long we have been separated from the other nations of the earth that one of our faults is a failure to appreciate the qualities of the people who are unlike us. I have often had occasion to quote something that Bret Harte said about the people of a frontier western camp, to whom came a stranger who was regarded by them as having the defective moral quality of being a “foreigner.” Difference from us does not involve inferiority to us. It may involve our inferiority to somebody else. The sooner our business men open their minds to the idea that the peoples of other countries, different races and speaking different languages and with different customs and laws, are quite our equals, worthy of our respect, worthy of our esteem, regard, and affection, the sooner we shall reach a basis on which we can advance our commerce all over the world. A little more modesty is a good thing for us occasionally; a little appreciation of the good qualities of others—and let me tell you that nowhere on earth are there more noble, admirable and lovable

qualities to be found among men than you will find among the people of Latin-America.

Gentlemen, I hope for you the effectiveness of a great and permanent organization and that you may advance the time when through more perfect knowledge, through broader sympathies and a better understanding, ties of commerce may bind together all our countries, advance our wealth and prosperity and well-being with equal step as they advance the wealth and prosperity and well-being of all those with whom we deal, and advance the tie of that perfect understanding of other peoples which is the condition of unbroken and permanent peace.